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The Panton, Leslie Papers: Letters of Edmund Doyle, Trader, 1808-1814

Edmund Doyle

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THE PANTON, LESLIE PAPERS

Letters of Edmund Doyle, trader*

Prospect Bluff Apalachicola

30th April 1808

John Forbes, Esqr.

Dear sir

Your letter per the shark dated at the Bay of St. Joseph 28th ulto came to hand on the 10th inst, by which I learn with sincere regret of the death of your brother, which I am sorry has deprived us of the pleasure of seeing you here as contemplated; in answer to which I beg you will have the patience to read which follows.-

On my arrival here in the month of October last, after a few days view of the place I concluded to write up the books and return by the first opportunity to Pensacola, but on a more minute examination into affairs, I found I could not be more serviceably employed than in the present place Davy Rowland informing me Mr. Hambly was blameable for keeping a large family about the place at a heavy expence to the Concern, who frequently involved him in quarrels: Mr. Hambly on the other hand representing Davy of very little assistance besides a notorious drunkard incapable of doing duty at times his assistance was wanted in dispatching the Indians. The charge against Davy I carefully verified, and an expence accruing here which I considered the small profits of the Concern unable to support: But what astonished me most

*Note-These letters are the first of a series of thirteen written by Edmund Doyle, their representative, to members of the firm of John Forbes & Co. (successors to Pantton, Leslie & Co.) from their trading house on the Apalachicola river between 1808 and 1817, in some of which mention is made of the intrigues of Capt. George Woodbine in that region. As an introduction to this series there appeared in the October, 1937, issue of the *Quarterly* a paper by Mark F. Boyd entitled *Events at Prospect Bluff on the Apalachicola River, 1808-1818.*

was the scene of inebriety this place represented during the continuance of the shark, the fumes of which had not subsided untill some time after her departure. On inquiry I found it was the mate of the shark, Mitchell, vending liquors on board the vessel, which I thought proper to suppress, as nothing could be more pernicious to the morals of the negroes besides holding so baneful an example to Indians.

The observation of Mr. Hambly keeping so many people about him, was afterward observed to me by Indians and particularly by a white man of the name of Shugart, then in Mr. Hambly's employ who gave me to understand that a Gentleman of the House was once ruined by a part of this connection, and that it was an unfortunate circumstance for Mr. Hambly to be in like danger. I really did not like to hear a conversation tending to criminate Mr. Hambly, and I walked off without ever making any (remark?) which I informed Mr. Hambly of on the spot, and that it was our duty to put it out of the power (of?) to criticize on our conduct: Mr. Hambly said it was the first time so many of the family were here and that a few days would rid us of the burthen, so the matter dropped.

Some time after this a circumstance happened which I was apprehensive would involve me in a dispute with Mr. Hambly and which I mentioned to him a few days afterward in the presence of Perryman, neither of them appeared displeased at the time nor can I say positively have been since. Shortly after Perryman's departure from this place a report prevailed highly against my character here as a clerk, and my duty to the Spanish Government as a subject; it was told with such art that I concluded some ingenious person was the inventor, of course I dreaded some foul charge being intended

to be represented you, as well as to the Spanish government, which induced me to exert myself and find out the author, and suppress such talks before they would come to your knowledge: and what confirmed me in the opinion of such reports being in circulation was The chiefs entering into measures to oppose my coming out, Rowlands information that my appearance on the Land was not welcome, moreover Mr. Hambly desiring an old chief who went to Pensacola from this place with cattle, that when I should come out here to bring an interpreter, as his state of health did not then allow him to act in that capacity, as the pronunciation of the tongue was very difficult, which I suppose must have been the case as he was rather in a low state of health on my arrival here, nor is he at present capable of undergoing the activity required in such a place as this when every exertion must be employed to manage the concern even in a moderate degree.

These circumstances induced me to act perhaps in a more guarded manner towards the Indians than I otherwise would have done in order to suppress such talks in future and annul those in circulation, and with pleasure I can assure you since my arrival here, to the present moment I have not had personal cause to be offended with an Indian. Altho you were informed by a chief of some note that I was driving Indians away from the store, at a time I was quite a stranger to them, this line of conduct will not answer here for some time at least: and this is some of the rest of the good talk they are pleased to object against me, and I must declare they are the most artful people in fiction I ever knew.

I must in Justice to my own feelings as well as to Mr. Hamblys character observe as I did before that I never did nor never can reconcile to myself that he would be capable of so base an action as to

involve me in disputes with the Indians, and ruin me in the sight of a Government renowned for the punishment of even small transgressions, altho' I was assured it was the case.

On Mr. Hartsfields arrival in the nation in February last from Charleston, a report prevailed of his bringing instruments with him to *desect the land*, that the House would take advantage of selling the same to the Americans as soon as the survey was made and a plot obtained, these reports were represented by a white man in the nation: immediately on this coming to my knowledge I consulted Mr. Hambly what should be done to satisfy the Indians of the falsity of this report, and concluded he would go up to the lower towns and have a talk with them, representing the intention of the survey. On his tour there he met some of the chiefs on their way down to the store for the purpose of talking with us, on their arrival I had a talk interpreted them by Mr. Hambly to the purport of the inclosed.

With pleasure I observed that the chiefs recd my talk very favorably and their entire confidence in the House, that they were happy to hear their old talks renewed, received into their confidence, denied having ever opposed my coming out, and that all this noise was circulated thro' the address of my interpreter, who was a character notorious for creating mischief since his first arrival in their Land, and at same time ordered him to depart their country on pain of death. In consequence of these circumstances any coolness I held towards Mr. Hambly ceased from that moment and I can also add that any misunderstanding between Mr. Hambly and me never induced either to be so far lost to a sence of our duty, to neglect our business, injure your property or interest altho' I labored under disagreeable apprehensions almost since my arrival here, and had in contemplation to desert the place,

untill on more mature consideration I was determined to await the issue of the storm, and depart with more ample cause of complaint.

I can assure you I never led a more active life than since my arrival here which the situation of the place required, and at present our establishment is as well as can be expected in a wilderness—I had some trouble in having it arranged, and I hope hereafter there will be no reason to complain. None of the negroes has run away as yet, and on enquiry I find none would wish to change their situation—I shall also beg leave to observe that altho' the chief gave privilege to Hartsfield to survey the Land, yet it mortifys them to no small degree that an American should be employed in any capacity about the place, and which I would recommend to be avoided as much as possible.

In consequence of some observations made known to me last by Mr. Hambly I am almost induced to acquit Perryman of the charges represented me against him, and I must consider this white man and a certain neighboring chief to be the instigation of this [illegible], Perryman also considers himself the chief person who brought about the purchase, and of course is doubly bound to protect the store, and the people who have the management of it. In regard to extra people living here they are Mr. Hamblys girl's mother and two children, and the cowkeepers wife, another of the family; both at the expence of (all?) parties concerned since the receipt of your letter at the request of Mr. Hambly, "the former will quit the place as soon as Mr. Hambly's child is weaned, who was obliged to to nurse the child account of the sickness of its mother, two of the family went away before Christmas and a young lad about a month ago.

Mr. Hambly desires I should observe to you, that part of this family arrived here in June and part

in September with provisions for their own maintenance for a considerable time, and that the circumstances of so many people living here of this family would perhaps never happen again, which was always odious to him but it could not have been well avoided he has also given me to understand that the chiefs have blamed me in the business to take notice of idle talk, that many reports are in circulation that are never intended to be carried into effect. On all these considerations I must deem myself blamable which I hope you will attribute to my ignorance of their customs—I shall remain here until such time as a person can be conveniently be sent in my place, and assuring you in behalf of Mr. Hambly as well as myself of our high respect for your own person as well as the rest of the Company-

I remain very respectfully
Your very humble and obdt servt
Edmund Doyle

* * *

Prospect Bluff Appala 1st Sept 1811

John Forbes Esqr

Dear Sir

Billy Perryman's visiting Nassau by desire of some of the Chiefs enables me to acknowledge the rect of your favors of the 10th & 11th June last which came to hand on the 2d July with the family of Negroes you were pleased to send on for the use of this Establishment.

The inclosed letters Respecting our indians affair preclude my saying much farther on the subject - - - In the course of conversation we asked the Lame King if he thought we could obtain payment of the Upper Creeks, and the best manner he thought it could be accomplished: he says if you can only send out a few families and commence the settle-

ment, and let the Store be better supplied he will undertake the Houses affairs, and in defiance to all opposition will obtain a cession of land on the western side of this River or some other payment to satisfy the demand, that the young indians would immediately silence every opposition against the House if they would only commence the settlement so as the appearance of bettering themselves would be in any shape appear to them

Mr Hambly and I am of the opinion that if some Satisfactory measures are not entered into so as to silence the murmurs of the indians it would be advisable to with draw the Store, and whatever property there is here, indeed there is evident signs of danger, and I believe this is the last appeal that will be made to the House, & that the result of this embassy will turn the scales one way or the other, we are insulted by the young people, our property is beginning to be sacraficed without getting satisfaction, which is generally the prelude of something worse—I do therefore hope that you will be able to dismiss Billy Perryman from Nassau satisfactorily

There are three Negroes in this land who run away from on board a vessel of a Mr Geo Johnson of Nassau, One of those Negroes, was taken up by the Shark at the Mouth of this River in distress and the other two took protection at the next indian village to this place

The Negroe that was taken up by the Shark told us he ran away from New Orleans, and after quitting the Shark here, he went up to the cowpen lame & sick, with an intent to proceed from thence to the Nation. I told him that he might remain here expecting the Shark or some other vessel round daily that I might send him on to Pensacola where his Master might have some chance of obtaining him: The vessel has not since arrived, and this fellow is still at the cowpen.

I now hear that he is one of the three who ran away from Mr Johnson, and if he could send on a vessel to take them on board at the Mouth of the River we could make the indians carry them on board for a trifling consideration; those Negroes say they were on board of the vessel that carried away Jacob, and two other Negroes belonging to Pensacola from Cape Florida to Nassau last winter, as soon as Jacob landed there I hear he got on board a vessel bound for the Havannah, which will be the last account of him I fancy

I have directed Billy Perryman to enquire of the people at Cape Florida the name of the vessel & Captain that took away the Negroes, and have written Mr Thomas Wilson at that place what can be proved concerning the affair, as I understand Mr Wilson had them tied—perhaps you could prevail on the people in that quarter to move here, Mr Wilson wrote us once or twice concerning his intentions of doing so—Mr. Hambly joins me in offering our best Respects and am D. Sr.

Your very obt. Servt.

Edwd Doyle

Endorsement

Edwd. Doyle 1st. Septr. 1811

Recd. 8th decr.

Ansr 29th Jany.

* * *

Prospect Bluff Appala 10th Octr. 1812

James Innerarity Esqr

Dear Sir

I had this morning the pleasure of receiving your favor of the 26th ulto. & has afforded me much satisfaction to hear of your safe arrival in the bosom of your family after so many disasters

I regret to inform you that Mr. Hambly's ill state of health will not allow him to meet your brother at the Tuckabatchy as directed, he has been attacked with the fever & ague almost since you left this and is now scarcely able to goe about, but is on the recovery: I have this day written to your brother to the Tuckabatchy to inform him of Mr Hambly's ill state of health, and to receive any commands he may be pleased to forward concerning the St. Augustine trip

Captain Cantons fears relating to the intended attack on St. Marks is not without some foundation, as Mr. Hartfield who arrived here a day or two after you left this informs us that a party are embodying near Milledgeville in Georgia to join the party at St Augustine to goe on that expedition & that they expect no opposition from the Indians, (but in this expectation if they attempt it which I very much doubt) they will be disappointed

I should be able to forward you the plats of the land by this conveyance if it was not for M r Hambly's indisposition The two plats you have seen are closed as directed, except that in order to make the quantity required in the lower one I was obliged to take in a considerable quantity of pine barren it otherwise answered my expectations, and is really a delightful tract: I only came in from this business last night, and tomorrow I shall set out to examine the tract at the Yellow bluff, and if it contains the quantity of land required I shall survey it, and forward the whole by the first opportunity: I am happy to hear the British Government have revoked their orders in council, as it may be the means of bringing about a peace and restoring commerce to those parts: since your departure from hence we have not heard from East Florida, nor did any opportunity offer to write to

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that quarter as you directed: Mr Hambly begs
leave to offer his best respects and am Dear Sir

Your very obt. Servt.

Edm: Doyle

I enclose a letter for Mr. Armstrong which
will be pleased to forward him

Endorsement

Edmund Doyle

10th. October 1812-

23

Address

James Innerarity Esqr.

Merchant

Pensacola

* * *

[*Captain Woodbine, the Indians and the
Americans*]

Prospect Bluff Appala 4th July 1814

Dear Sir

I've your favor of the 9th ulto since then I have
been in daily expectation of the arrival of indian
John who has not made his appearance. I should
have been in Pensacola long ago with the cattle
could I obtain drivers when first collected I had
a party selected for the purpose, and when required
to go they absolutely refused so doing alledging as
an excuse the backward state of their fields of corn,
but I believe the chief cause was fear of the Red
Sticks encamped at Scamby.

I gave the chief who last went to Pensacola
directions to well examine their stations in order
to evade them when the cattle was sent on which
he is determined on on his return.

Mr. Hambly is now several days employed in
forwarding them thro the nation and are well on
their way, but what renders it still most distressing

to me is their being detained on the path by Captain Woodbine in consequence of communications but yesterday received from indian Chiefs in the neighborhood of Pensacola and from white men in that town. These cattle have been very expensive in herding them upwards of two months and this detention untill he hears from you in answer to a letter he writes by this opportunity, together with the loss that will accrue and already sustained will completely bankrupt me, as I have several lots of cattle along on credit, the whole amounting to upwards of two hundred and fifty head of beef cattle you will very much oblige me by stating to Mr. Manuel Gonzales these reasons for his not having the cattle in due time, and I now doubt very much whether this will be allowed to go on at all as you will perceive by Captain Woodbines letter and he has moreover informed me that he believes he will want them for his own use. I shall however endeavor to bring them on, but Mr. Gonzales must otherwise provide for this disappointment which is at present out of my power to avert. Since the arrival of the expedition, the gentleman concerned even repeatedly informed me all in this quarter were an American party Perryman in particular told them there was a regular correspondence carried thro' our means to the American government by which all the endeavors of the indians to assist their British friends have been defeated—we have as yet (not?) found means to convince these gentlemen that we acted in strict conformity to the Governors directions who wished the indians within the Spanish Territory to remain neutral—these representations hitherto had little effect—and indeed I must say on the contrary for Captain Woodbine I believe did everything in his power to remove the prejudices of the indians-

In the communication, which was yesterday received from Pensacola it was stated that a quantity of ammunition and clothing was delivered you sometime ago from on board a British vessel, as a present from that Government to the Creeks, and that it was all deposited in the Stores except the powder which was lodged at the Barranca's and that this present was held back by you and the Governor for private motives: this is the principal inducement to hold back the cattle, and if a satisfactory reply is not given everything here will be seized by the indians, who may be induced to commit further hostilities against us -

I have *no doubt* but you will be able to give satisfaction, and it is, as usual, an unfounded tale propagated to do mischief before an explanation could take place as I have observed to Captain Woodbine—It was my intent to go on to Pensacola without further loss of time, but I was requested by Captain Woodbine to remain here, untill he received an answer to his letter, which was done I understand by desire of some of the chiefs, the person who has given this information delivered a packet of papers—and *I am commanded* to withhold his name for the present as soon as I go to Pensacola I shall make it known to you.

Altho' I never exceeded the injunction of the Spanish goverment my situation is very unsafe, it is now reported a party has been selected for some time to kill Hambly and myself privately, by the interference of Captain Woodbine I hope in a few days to have this affair explained, but remedy myself at present is impossible except by withdrawing out of the country which I mean to do as soon as I am at liberty to do so:

If anything should accidentally happen a Brother will no doubt sometime or other demand whatever little property I may have which I beg you will

deliver him, if it should come into your hands—I shall leave with Mr. Hambly an account of what I possess on my departure from hence, which will be immediately on receipt of your answer to this—as from the repeated accusations brought against us by evil inclined people I know not how far it might prejudice us to our present rulers here, who now begin to view things in a more unfavorable manner—

Mr. Wilson in Feb. last quit this country and went up to the American garrison he introduced himself to that Government by presenting a certificate from Perryman in Council, stating that Mr. Hambly was driving the indians on him, or on the Americans he reported that he gave this Certificate to Mr. Hawkins, who sent it to the Governor to Pensacola, complaining of Mr. Hambly this was done by Perryman and Wilson in order to prejudice the American government against us—from some private purposes Wilson entered into a contract to furnish the Garrison at Fort Mitchell with beef—his letters to Mr. Durant was intercepted and given Captain Woodbine, who requested the indians to secure him, the first opportunity: he was accordingly seduced down to Perryman and given up to Captain Woodbine, who found letters and contracts with him purporting him as a spy, and he now detains him here a prisoner of war. in consequence of his declaring himself to be a British subject—Captain Woodbine desires I should inform you that he will give him up to the Government if demanded—which Mr. Hambly begs you will have done in order that he may have an opportunity of vindicating his character from these malicious representations now becomes the duty of the House to support us—as we fear not an investigation of our conduct in any of the Courts concerned in the present contest—

The goods wanted by the indians strouds, binding, paint, powder and ball for hunting, hoes, axes and a few good scalping knives—if you wish to continue the store, a supply should be sent—the indians have few skins, or other property that we purchase therefore a very inconsiderable supply of the articles above mentioned will be sufficient, we have not more than half a load for the schooner Henry on hand

In the expectation of hearing from you as soon as possible

I remain Dr Sr very truly

Your obd servt

Edmd Doyle

Storekeeper at the Bluffs